

A Digital Interactive Exhibition from the Inside Out

Performance Review: *Human Presence in a Digital World* showcase by the Digital Interactive Arts Master Program and the Performing Arts and Film Master Program, Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University. Coordinators: Professor Rodica Mocan and Cristina Pop-Tiron. Central Shopping Center (3 February 2023)

On a particular Friday evening, 3 February 2023, people were invited to enjoy, live and play at the event called *Human Presence in a Digital World*, designed by students belonging to two master programs of the Faculty of Theatre and Film: The Digital Interactive Arts and the Performing Arts and Film. The students and their professors designed two interactive digital performances, as results of one of their courses. For these, the students with different backgrounds came together and joined their skills, their ideas and their interest in order to create a live performance incorporating digital elements. Friends, family, acquaintances and digital arts enthusiasts arrived at the Central Shopping Center, the 4th floor, starting from 19:00. The space hosts the filming studio of the faculty, so it was the right place for this event. People walked in through a long, carpeted hallway to find on their left a large space with chairs. The entire floor has very large windows to see and enjoy the view of the city at night. After waiting a few minutes for the audience to gather, they were informed about the schedule: the first performance, called *Anxiety*, started at 19:30 and the second, called *Jungle Machine*, started twenty minutes later.





Fig. 1: Image from the *Anxiety* performance (copyright Virgil Puia, 2023)

Anxiety was an interactive performance that took place in a large open space, as the audience was sitting down and was delivered a short introduction. In front of the wall, opposite to the spectators, there was a projector on the floor, about one meter away. The performer was standing against the wall, in line with the projection. The visuals simulated rain, pouring down on the performer. A woman's voice, one of the team members, started talking. It was as if she was sharing her personal experience, her feelings and sensations in the moments of her life when anxiety is manifesting. Her tone was slow, sometimes as if it was hard to bring out the words. While she was talking, the performer was trying to escape the rain, moving from left to right, down, towards the public and back. But whatever he did, the rain was following him, with no escape from it.

This production intended to replicate feelings of anguish, nervousness, unease, feelings anyone has felt at some point in their lives. The pouring rain can lead to significations of pain, sadness, distress, depression. *Anxiety* was meant as a proposed conversation between the human and the digital, without taking a precise form, as the conversation gets its shape from the movement of the performers. When the performance ended ten minutes later, the artists, namely Virgil Puiac, Ioana Hanchevici, Elvis Petrea and Elena Petrea were rewarded with appreciation and applause. The topic chosen is often present in many people's lives, even if only a few can talk about it. The audience took their time to congratulate and discuss with the artists, just enough before the second performance started.



Fig. 2: Image from the *Jungle Machine* performance (copyright Virgil Puiac, 2023)

Jungle Machine was set up in the film and photography studio, further down the hallway. The room was spacious, with the floor and ceiling painted in black, with foam texture on the walls. The feeling of spaciousness was

given by the fact that the room was empty, except for a table in the middle, with a spotlight shining on it from the top. On the left and right sides of the table there were two tall plants, and on the table there were: an apple, a banana, a bottle, a spoon, a pineapple, a mango, a knife, a metal bowl, a red pepper, a moka, and an orange. Quite an intriguing table for a performance. Hidden under the table, the projector was set up to show the visuals on the wall in front of the table, opposite the entrance.

The artists Peter Leidl, Gergely Matyas and Marta Winkler were all involved in the performance. Once they started, the set-up looked like a musician's desk, or a piano, but one with metal objects and fruits. By touching the objects and fruits, the performers started to *play* this peculiar instrument, they were creating music. In a different approach from the first performance, in *Jungle Machine* the interaction was tactile, each object on the table had a sound or melody assigned to it, as well as elements for the interactive visual on the wall. The performance also lasted about ten minutes, during which the time the space gave the sense of an audio-visual performance. Here, the spectators were standing, so they could feel free to move and dance to the jungle rhythms they were listening to. The performers knew well which objects to touch and when to do so, as well as for how long, in order to create the musical rhythm they intended. At the end, the artists were also rewarded with appreciation and applause, along with a generous dose of curiosity.

The spaces of both performances changed their status to interactive installations, where the public could experience them, play in the digital rain and explore the fruits to discover the music. This was one interesting thing that both performances and their artists did at the end of the shows. Some people went back to the first room, in the space of *Anxiety*, to play and interact with the chasing rain. They were also taking pictures with the beautiful aesthetic of the pouring rain, maybe even forgetting the intended meaning behind it. In the second room, in the space of the *Jungle Machine*, the people were having great fun becoming musicians themselves. The artists were there to explain the mechanics of the installation and the audience was interested in exploring what the installation had in store for them. It was a pleasant sight to see people, with and without musical knowledge, playing this fruit instrument and listening to the creation of their music.

The *Human Presence in Digital World* showcase stands a balanced bond of deep feelings expressed through digital elements and human presence, together with basic needs for movement and rhythms, driven by curiosity and discovery. The artists created two projects that impacted the audience in different ways. Digital interactive performances are valuable productions that emphasize both the digital and aesthetic tools, in the scope of exploring the relevance of the human presence in conveying a meaningful experience.

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